Amtrak Engineer Acquitted in 2015 Fatal Amtrak Wreck

The wreck of Amtrak 188 is an unresolved tragedy. Convicting the engineer, Brandon Bostian, seven years later, would have made things worse.

By Fritz Edler

A lot of railroaders are going to remember where they were on the night of May 12, 2015. At 9:21pm ET that night, Amtrak’s eastbound train 188 was derailed in a deadly wreck near Frankfort Junction, PA. It took the lives of 8 and 185 were injured. It impacted many people’s views of what a passenger rail tragedy in the US could look like.

Fast forward to March 4, 2022. Nearly 7 years after the event, an ambitious Philadelphia prosecutor brings Amtrak Engineer Brandon Bostian to trial on criminal charges that could have sent him to prison for the rest of his life. By the time of this last criminal proceeding, the badly injured Bostian twice had charges dropped and later had them reinstated. He had lost his career as a railroader. There had been numerous hearings, even in Congress. Amtrak had to pay out over $200 million in settlements.

The jury took only one hour to finally put an end to the prosecution, and hopefully the persecution, of Bostian. The verdict: Not Guilty on all counts! Legally, this is the final word. But there is some more that should be said.

First, it’s a good thing Bostian was found Not Guilty, but there never should have been a criminal trial. Just as importantly, the whole process failed in the search for prevention of future such disasters.

Thinking About the AMT 188 Crash

I was at a gym on the evening of May 12, 2015, and saw the news on a TV set to a news channel. It froze me in place, as the news likely did for all my coworkers who, like me, had worked trains over that route over decades. Most of us, though personally experienced with smaller scale tragedies on the rails, have fortunately been spared the experience of the warlike devastation of the 188 wreck.

Continued on Page 3
RWU News

RWU Convention Organizing Steams Ahead. All Aboard!

The RWU Convention program is coming together, as the myriad workshops, presentations and forums take shape. Along with the internal business of the organization, we hope to have a dozen or so sessions where we learn about and discuss many issues of importance to railroad workers and our allies. Railroad specific issues will be scheduled for Thursday, June 16th, Day #1 of the Convention, while broader transportation issues and alliance building workshops will take place on Friday, June 17th, as thousands more workers from industries across the spectrum start to pour into the Convention center for the big Labor Notes conference that starts that day.

Highlights currently include:
- Labor organizer and author Joe Burns – who in 2016 led a workshop on understanding and making use of the Railway Labor Act - will be back this year with updates and new information. His presentation will build on the University of Iowa Labor Center workshop which RWU sponsored this past winter via Zoom.
- French railway worker David Gobe, Chair of the Railway Workers Section of the International Transport Workers’ Federation will talk about safe, expanded rail service – freight and passengers – worldwide, and how to build the movement to achieve this while expanding infrastructure and rail employment.
- RWU safety advisor Nancy Lessin - who has worked in workplace health and safety for the Steelworkers union and others for decades - will address the Convention on the state of safety in the rail industry today. Nancy has been at every Convention since our founding in 2008.
- Founder of the Climate Rail Alliance David White – who was worked in the rail industry for more than half a century –, author of a new book that advocates a major expansion of rail, will present his thoughts on the need to achieve a more robust rail system in the face of climate change.
- An “Organizing Across Supply Chains” workshop will include workers along the supply chain – longshore, drayage and over-the-road trucking, warehouse, and railroad, and be conducted at both e RWU Convention and Labor Notes conference. We will discuss how to organize and build solidarity to gain power along all the links of the supply chain.
- Various workshops on building RWU membership, getting our Committees more active, and making better use of social media are all on tap as well as other events still in the works.

RWU encourages all members to register and attend this exciting event. If you can come to the RWU Convention, please consider also staying the weekend for the Labor Notes conference. You can register for both through RWU and save $25. See the RWU website and click on the Convention drop-down menu for more information on registration, lodging, transportation, and more. For further information, call RWU General Secretary Ron Kaminkow at 608-358-5771.

RWU Produces new Line of T-shirts

RWU has taken delivery of an order for more of our best selling T-shirts. Each shirt has the small (4") RWU logo in full color on the left breast and the full size logo on the back (12"). Various sizes including 3XL that we had sold out of have been replenished and ready to order. In addition, we have made this shirt available in a few new colors: navy blue, tan and pink! Get yours while they last because we ordered a limited supply. And we continue to offer T-shirts of all sizes in our classic black and gray.

Go to www.railroadworkersunited.storenvy.com or hit the RWU Store link on our website @ www.railroadworkersunited.org. While you’re there stock up on swag to express your opposition to single-employee crews, which is on sale.

Railroad Workers United

Railroad Workers United was organized in April 2008 at a Founding Convention in Dearborn, MI. RWU grew out of decades of struggle within the craft unions for unity, solidarity, and democracy. We are carrying on a tradition of rank & file activity which dates back to the 1890s and the time of Eugene V. Debs.

RWU is a cross-craft inter-union caucus of rail labor activists across North America. All rail workers of all crafts from all carriers who support our Statement of Principles are welcome to join in our efforts. Please write, call, or email. See the contact information below.

Statement of Principles

Unity of All Rail Crafts
An End to Inter-Union Conflict
Rank-and-File Democracy
Membership Participation & Action
Solidarity Among All Railroaders
No to Concessionary Bargaining

www.railroadworkersunited.org ● info@railroadworkersunited.org ● 202-798-3327 or 202-RWU-DEBS
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Chet Whyers, UTU #979, UP, Salem, IL

Spring 2022
Carriers Profiting from Supply Chain Crisis After Cutting Costs...

Continued from Page 1

One of the most notable criticisms of railroads abusing their market power at the expense of American consumers and shippers has come from a key federal rail regulator, STB Chairman Martin Oberman. In September 2021, Oberman condemned the industry’s "pursuit of the almighty OR" — referring to the railroads’ efforts to slash their operating ratios by cutting costs. Oberman estimated that since 2010, the industry spent $46 billion more on stock buybacks and dividends than on maintenance and equipment investments, which would have increased the rail system’s resilience against the kind of supply chain shocks that are currently straining consumers’ wallets and access to everyday necessities.

An Accountable US review has found that nearly all of the seven Class I railroads have enjoyed high profits amid the supply chain crisis while raising fees, cutting costs and operating ratio, increasing shareholder handouts, and disclosing at least $9.37 million on lobbying related to competition, mergers, and Biden’s July 2021 executive order.

Keep the following highlights in mind in the context of ongoing contract negotiations:

- BNSF saw its net income jump by double digits in Q3 2021, while its parent company spent $12.6 Billion on stock buybacks in the first six months of 2021.
- Union Pacific had its "Most Profitable Year Ever" in 2021, enabling them to spend over $10 Billion on shareholder handouts.
- Canadian National increased its net income by 37% in Q4 2021, boosting its stock buybacks by 317%.
- CSX saw a 37% jump in net earnings and increased stock buybacks by 233%.
- Norfolk Southern saw net income surge 27%, while increasing stock buybacks by 143%.
- Canadian Pacific Railway saw net income climb 17% to about $2.2 Billion, while trying to acquire the KCS for $25 Billion.
- Kansas City Southern saw Q4 2021 net income jump 258%, and spent $188 Million on shareholder dividends in FY 2021.

In Conclusion: In addition to what rail workers have long known about the carriers’ unsafe working conditions that also endanger the public by extension, this report indicts them for their role in supply chain issues as well. These facts can be a powerful weapon for our unions to effectively state our case to the public, in preparation for the inevitable battles ahead.

Amtrak Engineer Acquitted in 2015 Fatal Amtrak Wreck

Continued from Page 1

At stake was the very basic question of who creates risk on the rails and whether the one or ones responsible for the conditions will ever be personally held accountable, and not just on Amtrak 188. What’s posed is how the railroads, and captive regulators create a narrative that evades and distracts from real fixes.

“Never should have been a trial.”

It took the National Transportation Safety Board over a year to make their final report on the event. In May of 2016, they issued their Accident Report on AMT 188 (NTSB/RAR-16/02 PB2016-103218). Their conclusions were on page 42 of that report. They made 13 conclusions. But the most important aspect of the report is what is left out. The NTSB listed the things that they had considered as factors but ruled out. They considered mechanical failure, condition of the track, weather, medical conditions, impairment, cell phone, and supposedly fatigue. Having ruled these out, the NTSB jumped straight to the conclusion, without evidence, that Bostian had lost situational awareness and therefore was a proximal cause of the derailment. The story was they decide what counts, and if nothing else fits, its operator error. Case closed.

This is a textbook example of the Negative Fallacy. This is a formal (in this case, legal) fallacy where a positive conclusion is reached by one or more negative premises. So, because there is no considered evidence that something else happened, therefore the Engineer is guilty.

A thorough investigation would have considered other factors. One of the most important of those is the fundamental question of whether the physical railroad itself posed unnecessary risk and whether anyone takes this into account. But this factor is nowhere to be found in the NTSB report.

The Acquittal of Brandon Bostian on March 4, 2022, from all criminal charges is good news for all rail workers.

But don’t forget Bostian will never be made whole and never get his full life back. He will continue to live with the speculation and his own questions. But consider what would have been true if the jury had found him guilty. If he had been found guilty, he would have spent the rest of his life in prison. Another legal precedent would have been created for the obviously wrong idea that the last least powerful person in the chain of responsibility is the one who pays. Acquittal takes another excuse away from the managers who deliberately maintain or advance unsafe practices, expecting to blame the last worker when those practices end up logically with greater risk. Acquittal makes it harder for the Carriers to engage in the standard safety misdirection.

Again, there never should have been a trial. But defeating that unjust prosecution helps us. The Carriers, their lawyers, their captive regulators, and the prosecutors will try again in another case. We’ll have to be ready with solidarity when they do. But THIS time, we have a good thing to celebrate.

Fritz Edler started in the rail industry in 1978, working several different crafts, before becoming a passenger locomotive engineer for Amtrak in 1990. Fritz was a long time officer of BLET Division 482 in Washington DC, and an officer of the BLET DC State Legislative Board. He is an RWU Delegate to the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) and the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED). Beginning in 2015, he was Chair of the Harding/LaBrie Defense Committee, that organized international support for the railroaders scapegoated for the tragic Lac-Mégantic oil train wreck. He organized and led the BLET directed project that continues to repower antiquated and unhealthy switcher locomotives in the Washington Terminal. That project is producing the most advanced and worker friendly switcher fleet in North America.
The following article is reprinted from the Feb 2, 2022 issue of Labor Notes.

By Joe DeManuelle-Hall, a staff writer and organizer at Labor Notes.

Rail remains one of the most heavily unionized industries in the country, and rail workers maintain the arteries of the economic system. In 2018, U.S. railroads moved 1.73 trillion ton-miles of freight, while trucks moved 2.03 trillion. (One ton-mile is one ton of freight moved one mile.) A slim majority of rail freight consists of bulk commodities, ranging from grain to mined ores to automobiles; slightly less is made up of consumer goods.

Cost-cutting Frenzy

In the flurry of reporting on what’s slowing down the supply chain, little has been said about one contributing factor—the years-long squeeze that major railroads have put on their operations and workforces.

Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) is a nebulous term that has come to cover many measures aimed at cutting costs and increasing profits. (Although the name refers to trains operating on a set schedule, that’s just one piece.) All the railroads engage in elements of it.

PSR is basically the railroad version of lean production—the methodology of systematic speedup and job-cutting that caught on in manufacturing in the ’80s and spread to many industries. The railroads have done it by cutting less-profitable routes; closing and consolidating railyards, repair barns, and other facilities; running fewer, longer trains; and laying off tens of thousands of workers while demanding the remaining workers do more.

Class I railroads—the companies with annual revenues over $900 million—employed fewer workers this January than any month since 2012, falling below even the early-pandemic slump. Railroads have cut as many as 35 percent of workers in some titles over the past several years. Overall there were 160,795 Class I rail workers in December 2015, and only 114,499 by December 2021. At the same time, individual freight trains were hauling, on average, 30 percent more tonnage in 2020 than in 2000.

But all these practices add up to a system that doesn’t function well under pressure—the pressure of a global pandemic, or even just the pressure of normal operations. In stretched-out, just-in-time supply chains with no room for error, delays cascade into more delays.

Jobs Made Unbearable

For the workers who remain, PSR has transformed their jobs for the worse. Workers have fewer days off and even more irregular schedules than they’re used to. Longer trains are harder to operate and more prone to derailments.

The railroads have cut back on inspections. They have deferred and outsourced maintenance that was traditionally done by union workers. And they are continuing their push to reduce the crews of these ever-longer trains from two people to one.

All in all, the railroads have created a crisis: they’ve laid off so many people that many of those who remain consider the situation unbearable.

Workers report that some of their co-workers have already quit before retirement, and many are looking for other jobs—actions that were once unheard-of in a highly desirable and steady line of work.
Unions Are Bargaining Over a Good Job Made Miserable

The larger is the Coordinated Bargaining Coalition, made up of 11 unions. The smaller coalition is two unions: the BMWE and SMART Mechanical Division (SMART-MD). And even this reflects a recent consolidation—in the last negotiations, there were three union coalitions.

Jurisdiction and union politics can be messy. BMWE and the Engineers (BLET) are both Teamsters affiliates, yet they bargain separately; it’s the same for SMART’s two affiliates.

Rail and airline unions are governed by the Railway Labor Act (RLA). Passed a decade before the National Labor Relations Act, the RLA gives the federal government a much heavier hand in negotiations and adds many more steps. Unions can’t strike during contract negotiations until after they have been “released” by the government to do so, and that comes only after they have exhausted other steps—and if Congress doesn’t intervene to block a strike.

The last national railroad strike took place in 1991, and lasted a single day before Congress and President Bush sent the strikers back to work.

A Friendlier Board

The current bargaining with the major rail carriers has been going on since 2019, when the contracts came up for amendment. Rail contracts don’t expire.

Until recently, the National Mediation Board—the three-member body that oversees the RLA—was dominated by Republican nominees, who were more likely to side with the railroads. But in December the Senate confirmed President Biden’s pick Deirdre Hamilton, creating a 2-1 majority of Democratic appointees. Hamilton had previously worked for the Association of Flight Attendants and the Teamsters.

Unions can now be expected to push the process forward more quickly than before.

The Coordinated Bargaining Coalition finally requested mediation in January. The BMWE/SMART-MD coalition has been in mediation since July. Yesterday it declared impasse and called for the next step: the creation of a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB).

Biden has the power to create a PEB once mediation is exhausted and if either side refuses binding arbitration. The PEB would have 30 days to issue a recommendation, followed by a 30-day “cooling-off” period. At the end of this period, a strike or lockout could take place—or Congress could step in.

Given the national attention on the supply chain and the economy, Democratic politicians would be under significant pressure to resolve a dispute without a strike.

What’s a Weekend?

Meanwhile, outside of negotiations, other disputes are escalating.

Everyone is on edge—worried about safety as corners get cut; run ragged by increased workloads, understaffing, and the totalitarian enforcement of disciplinary policies.

At Norfolk Southern, one of the companies that has made the deepest cuts, engineers were forced to work out of craft as conductors—to plug staffing shortages that were the employer’s own fault. (While there are many rail crafts, the biggest two are engineers, who operate the trains, and conductors, who are responsible for a variety of tasks like radio communications and switching cars.)

BLET and SMART-TD sought an injunction to stop the practice and reinstate engineers who had refused to work out of title. If the courts rule that this is a “major dispute” under the RLA, the unions could potentially strike; if they rule it a “minor dispute,” the best they can hope for is arbitration while the policy remains in place.

BNSF announced a new points-based attendance policy for its engineers and conductors, who already have irregular schedules with inconsistent days off. Conductors and engineers work “on call,” working many days in a row and getting called in at wildly different times. Workers have difficulty taking even earned time off, and railroaders don’t have paid sick days.

Under the new system, as one worker described it, after taking off a Saturday and a Sunday together you would have to work weeks or months straight, with no day off, to dig yourself out of the hole.

BLET and SMART-TD, the unions representing the 17,000 workers in these crafts at BNSF, announced that they would call for a strike over the unilateral policy change. BNSF sought, and got, an injunction in federal court against a strike. But while the issue gets fought over in the courts, BNSF implemented the attendance policy on February 1.

Everyone is on edge—worried about safety as corners get cut; run ragged by increased workloads, understaffing, and the totalitarian enforcement of disciplinary policies.

The railroad workers I spoke to were convinced that their co-workers would stick it to their employers one way or another—whether by rejecting contracts that aren’t satisfactory, by walking away from a career, or by going on strike.
Rail Labor Bargaining, Now and in the Future: What is to be Done?

Before I pick up where I left off at the end of my commentary in the Winter 2022 Highball, titled, “Do Rails Have the ‘Right’ to Strike?”, I’ve got to give a shout out to our brothers and sisters at the JFK8 Amazon warehouse in Staten Island, NY. The workers there scored a major victory for the working class, voting in favor of the Amazon Labor Union, the first successful organizing drive at Amazon in the US. I tip my cap to Brother Chris Smalls, the lead organizer, and his team, who motivated, inspired, challenged, organized and led their co-workers and peers to victory in a real life battle of David vs. Goliath proportions.

One of the Amazon officials is on record in an internal memo describing Brother Chris as, "...not very intelligent or articulate." I hope Brother Chris took a brief, celebratory moment to ponder the age-old, rhetorical question, “So how do you like me now?”, before getting back to the serious task at hand.

This victory is a powerful example of what rank & file initiative can accomplish. They’ve got their challenges ahead and all working people need to be at the ready to aid and assist them in any way possible, whenever called upon. As this issue goes to press, RWU activists took up a collection and donated $500. Please express your support for their efforts any way you can.

Well alright then, back to our tenuous situation. In my previous commentary I summed up the scenarios of how things have and most likely would play out again should railroad workers get forced into striking in defense of our dignity, quality of life on and off the job, as well as our safety and that of the public. The article on Page 4-5, “Unions Are Bargaining Over a Good Job Made Miserable”, eloquently summarizes what we’re up against, as well as the current, potential flash-point conflicts. I can only imagine what else might transpire during the shelf life of this issue.

The editorial on Page 7 spells out all the various and many ways railroad workers are divided. Divide & conquer has served the carriers well, but it’s important to note that this MO has been enabled at every step by the union leadership. At times they’ve contended that by breaking away from a national pattern, they could get a better deal at an individual RR, division and/or terminal to then set a more favorable precedent for subsequent negotiations. All I can say is how is that worked out? We all know how well being divided by craft aids and abets the carriers. Most likely that’s why you’re reading this. Sorry, I had to vent.

With railroad workers beyond fed up, combined with the aggressive, arrogant intransigence of the carriers, it is not out of the realm of possibility that after the carriers and the unions go through all the motions and jump through all the hoops mandated by the RLA, that we could be looking at a national strike. So, under the existing terms of engagement, what would this look like? How might this play out?

I’m not a professional, certified psychic, nor am I a gambling man, but if I were, based on how these scenarios have played out on my watch, I’d bet a year’s pension that any national strike would immediately be ended, most likely before it even begins, by legislative fiat, a PEB, per the RLA. Congress and the president will rubber-stamp the recommendations of the PEB and voila – there’s your new contract. It may not contain everything the carriers want, but they gain significant concessions that the workers would not have voluntarily agreed to. This is how it’s played out like clockwork over the years on my watch, going back to the mid-1970s.

While direct government intervention in the form of a PEB has only played out on a few occasions in that time, all the other rounds of negotiations are heavily influenced by the gun-to-the-head threat of government intervention. “This contract isn’t what we would like, but I urge you to ratify it, because if we go to a third party (i.e. arbitration or a PEB) it will probably be worse”, is a common refrain from the union leadership over the years, so stop me if you’ve heard it before. However it goes down, the union leadership will say they gave it the ol’ college try and implore rails to work harder to get more Democrats elected in the future. So it goes, and so it goes, and so it goes, etc.

Or does it? It will as long as we continue to accept these existing terms of engagement, which obviously serve the carriers well. So what do we do? Good question. This is my honest personal opinion: Being a student of the history of the struggle for social justice, I am convinced that there will come a time when rail workers will be pushed over the edge. I see it as inevitable that at some point there will be a rank & file upsurge to defy a presidential back-to-work order and stay out on strike.

While I’m convinced that ultimately needs to happen, I’m also not advocating for that at this point in time simply because railroad workers have not adequately prepared for what would be an act of class warfare. While that may sound like volatile terminology, it’s the carriers who wage class warfare on us every day. To strike and ultimately defy a presidential back-to-work order would simply be a justifiable act of self-defense. To paraphrase an old saying describing the wrath of a betrayed lover, “Hell hath no fury like the ruling class scorned.” Make no mistake - they would come after us with everything, including the kitchen sink, and more. The only way that we could prevail is if we had the overwhelming support of the working class and the general public to hopefully neutralize the inevitable legal, and most likely violent, repression we would face.

In conclusion, I feel it is critical that railroad workers soberly confront this inevitable inevitability and start preparing for it yesterday. For starters we should demand that our union leaders use their resources and bully pulpit to effectively state our case to the public. While you’re waiting for that to happen, you might as well join RWU now to interact with other like-minded fighters.

On the picket line in the Twin Cities during the 1994, 47-day, UTU strike against the Soo Line, who failed miserably in their attempt to break the UTU.

Mark Burrows has served as Organizer and Co-Chair for RWU. He recently retired after hiring out in 1974, working as an engineer for a combined total of 37 years for the C&NW and the Soo Line/CP Rail in Chicago, Illinois. He was SMART-TD 1433’s Delegate for the 2011 & 2014 International Conventions and continues to be an active member of RWU.
One Big Bargaining Coalition – An Idea Whose Time Has Come!

As we predicted, the current round of bargaining is turning out to be a showdown between the Class One freight carriers and the myriad unions. The carriers have been blunt - they insist on givebacks in healthcare and work rules. Specifically, as predicted, they are pushing hard to win implementation of single person crew operations. They have lots of money, lawyers, judges, politicians and legislation in their vast arsenal to assist them in their efforts. These wealthy Class One rail carriers are all “Fortune 500” corporations, some of the most powerful private entities in the world. Make no mistake, railroad workers are going up against some mighty big guns.

Given that we have an infinitesimally small amount of money in comparison; that we have a fraction of the legal team; that judges are generally pro-corporate and pro-business in outlook; that the laws were written and enforced to protect the interests of private property - not labor; and that the two political parties are both well-funded by big business, leaving workers with little political representation, what do we have going for us? Just what the hell are we to do?

To take the carriers head on effectively, we need to play ball in our court, not in their court. The biggest weapon that we have in our arsenal is the weapon known as working class solidarity. Without this basic and most important tool at our disposal, we would not stand a chance of achieving victory over such a formidable opponent. So, if solidarity is so important to our cause, just exactly what is it? How do we nurture it and build it? What are the obstacles to achieving it and putting it to work for us?

Solidarity is defined as “an awareness of shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies creating a psychological sense of unity of groups or classes.” It is the bedrock upon which all workplace unions are created and sustained. Eugene V Debs, founder of the American Railway Union and the father of railroad unionism in the United States, had this to say: “We need to have faith in each other. We are in precisely the same position. We depend absolutely on each other. We know that without solidarity, nothing is possible; and that with solidarity, nothing is impossible.”

To achieve some semblance of solidarity then, we must first conclude that we and our fellow workers are in the same boat, that our futures are inextricably linked to one another’s. On the surface this might sound easy enough. But there are countless hurdles that stand in the way of achieving that solidarity. The rail carriers – as with most employers - have been historically successful in sowing deep division among working people. Race, religion, national origin, language, gender, and sexual orientation have been a few of the tricks they have exploited to keep workers separate, apart, and powerless. But in many cases, workers have been able to overcome these divisions and unite.

Nevertheless, there are countless other ways that rail workers can be kept in submission. Here are just a few of the ways that railroaders have typically been divided: Yard versus Road; freight versus passenger; high seniority versus low seniority; “protected” vs “non-protected” or “pre-85” vs “post-85”; and by shift, department, carrier, terminal, district, hub, division, sub-division, service unit, and more. In building our unions, we must be able to overcome all these obstacles to achieving solidarity. In many cases, we have been.

Yet one of the biggest stumbling blocks to achieving the solidarity we desperately need is the perpetual question of craft. That is because this false division was institutionalized early on in railroad history, surprisingly by the unions themselves. Rail workers began to organize earlier than many workers due to the dangerous and harsh working conditions they faced. Those who worked together in craft felt a distinct solidarity with one another, as they shared workspace, tools, knowhow, and wisdom. In many cases their very lives depended intimately upon building trust with one another. So, it comes as no surprise that we originally organized along craft lines when we first got started. But within a few decades, it became apparent to many rail workers and some union officials – including Eugene Debs – that organizing along craft lines was actually hindering – rather than building – rail worker solidarity, crippling their ability to win their battles with the powerful rail carriers of the late 19th century.

Fast forward more than 125 years to today, and unfortunately, that albatross is still around our collective necks. But there is some good news. Compared to previous rounds of bargaining with the powerful rail carriers, in this round the archaic and antiquated craft unions - hopefully realizing that none of them can win alone and now refusing to be whipsawed against one another as they traditionally have allowed - have come together in coalition. This is a vast improvement upon previous national contact bargaining; however, we are not quite there yet. It is imperative that the two existing rail union coalitions join forces and present a single, united, unshakable front to the carriers. There is too much at stake in this round for any rail union to remain apart from the others.

“There is too much at stake in this (bargaining) round for any rail union to remain apart from the others.”

Ultimately, what we need is what exists in many countries – an industrial union of all railroad workers from all crafts and departments – to effectively coordinate future actions and to mitigate the power of the carriers. In the meantime, the union officials owe it to the members to come together in One Big Bargaining Coalition that is united and indivisible. Without such unity at the organizational level, solidarity among the respective membership will be forever compromised, to the detriment of all rail labor. The time for divisiveness and squabbling has long passed. All for one and one for all! The time is NOW!
“The simple fact is that industrial conditions have undergone such a complete change that now the trade union, instead of uniting the workers, divides them, incites craft jealousy, breeds dissention and promotes strife – the very thing capitalists desire … Why should the railroad employees be parceled out among a score of different organizations? They are all employed in the same service. Their interests are mutual. They ought to be able to act together as one.”

Eugene V Debs, Founder of the American Railway Union

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